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AUTHOR Mandes, Carolyn P.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This study undertook to identify parental perceptions of variables related to their child's education and to determine differences in perceptions of groups of parents categorized by grade level, race, and sex of the child. Survey questionnaires were distributed to parents of the students at Marvin Pittman Laboratory School, a K-8 school with 457 students. The instrument included items related to background variables, educational expectations rated on a Likert-type scale (from "extremely important" to "not important"), a ranking of curricular subjects in order of importance, preferences for homework time allotment and instructional grouping arrangements, and one open-ended item eliciting additional questions or comments. Results indicate that these parents place higher importance on classroom behavior, study skills, cooperation with adults, and problem-solving than on standardized tests, computer knowledge, leadership, or table manners. Highest ranking curriculum subjects were reading, arithmetic, grammar, and spelling, while lowest ranking subjects included French, industrial arts, home economics, and typing. Statistically significant differences were recorded between perceptions of parents categorized by grade level, race, and sex. Specific findings are presented in 13 tables, and the survey instrument is appended. (TE)

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ESSENTIAL SKILLS IN THE ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL: PARENTAL PRIORITIES

Researchers:

Fred M. Page, Jr.

Jane A. Page

Johnny W. Tremble

Presented by

Carolyn P. Mandes

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Perspective

American education--the very foundation of this great land--is a studied entity. Committees serving at the pleasure of the United States Congress have carefully examined the educational process. A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform is further evidence of the federal government's interest in schooling. The Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward Public Schools serves notice that society in general maintains an abiding interest in educational opportunities offered the nation's children. Current literature, then, reflects that different segments of our populace have been queried on the topic of education.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of the study was two-fold: (1) to identify parental perceptions of variables related to their child's education; and (2) to determine differences in perceptions of groups of parents categorized on the bases of grade level, race, and sex of child.

Data Source and Methods

Perhaps the public, outside of students, that is most involved and has the most significantly vested interest in our schools are the parents of today's youth. The population for this study was parents of the Marvin Pittman Laboratory School students. The laboratory school serves grades kindergarten through eighth with an enrollment of 457 students. Homeroom teachers distributed questionnaires (see page 18) to each child. Parents with more than one child in the school were requested to complete a questionnaire for each child enrolled. Three hundred sixty-seven instruments (80%) were completed and used in the study. The instrument contained several type questions:

three controlled-choice items related to background variables;

fifteen items pertained to educational expectancies that were rated on a Likert-type scale, ranging from "extremely important" to "not important";

seventeen curricular subjects were listed with the perceived ten most important to be ranked in descending order;

two controlled-choice items related to desired amount of time for homework and preferred type of student grouping for instruction;

one open-ended item elicited questions/comments not expressed in the survey instrument.

A variety of sources contributed to development of the instrument. Panels of parents, inservice teachers, teacher educators, and public school administrators were interviewed to determine instrument composition. Along with the interviews, a review of current literature contributed to item inclusions.

Results

Specific findings of the study are identified in Tables I through XIII, pages 5 through 18. Some of the major findings include:

1. Variables rated more often as extremely important or very important included classroom behavior, study skills, cooperation with adults, and problem-solving ability.

2. Variables rated least often as extremely important or very important included score on standardized tests, computer knowledge, leadership, and table manners.

3. Curriculum subjects receiving the highest rankings included reading, arithmetic, grammar, and spelling.

4. Curriculum subjects receiving the lowest rankings included French, industrial arts, home economics, and typing.

5. A large number (41.1%) of the parents indicated a desire for their children to spend from one-half to one hour with homework; only 2.5% indicated that children should spend more than two hours with homework.

6. Almost half (49.6%) of the respondents preferred that their children be placed in classes which are heterogeneously grouped. Fewer respondents (46.3%) preferred that their children be placed with those of similar ability.

7. There were eight significant differences between perceptions of parents categorized on the basis of grade level of child.

8. There were thirteen significant differences between perceptions of parents categorized on the basis of race of child.

9. There were six significant differences between perceptions of parents categorized on the basis of sex of child.

Conclusions

Are these parents outdated in their aspirations for the education of their children? Are they oblivious to the media blitz on minimum competency and other kinds of testing? Perhaps, on both accounts.

On the other hand, perhaps their responses are affirmations of theories that have long held a place of esteem in the educational process. Dewey's emphasis on problem solving and Bruner's description on learning how to learn have once again been validated. It is possible that responses of these parents would receive a "warm fuzzy" from David Elkind in his concern for the shortening of childhood.

Differences in perceptions have been noted in regard to grade level, sex, and race. It is important that teachers and administrators are aware of these differences. Such recognition should be meaningfully incorporated as feedback. Consideration of parental desires enables not only a perpetutation, but also a betterment of society.

There is a message for teacher educators, too. Recent nationwide trends have been leading us away from proven educational processes. Before our programs are re-tooled to meet the challenges of "the wheels that are squeaking the loudest," it may be a sound move to listen to those closest to our children and see what their desires are.

Granted, the population for this study is limited--geographically and in number. Yet, it may serve as a catalyst to check with other parents. As checking broadens in scope, so, too, may the foundation for educating the total child and not just the child for the test.

TABLE I

FREQUENCY TABULATIONS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

GRADE LEVEL OF CHILD

Grade	Absolute Frequency	Percentage of Total
K	41	11.2
1	26	7.1
2	49	13.4
3	52	14.2
4	41	11.2
5	43	11.7
6	33	9.0
7	42	11.4
8	40	10.9

RACE OF CHILD

Race	Absolute Frequency	Percentage of Total
Black	100	27.2
White	260	70.8
Other	7	1.9

SEX OF CHILD

Sex	Absolute Frequency	Percentage of Total
Female	180	49
Male	187	51

TABLE II

FREQUENCY TABULATIONS

PARENTAL RATINGS OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

IN YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION AT SCHOOL, HOW IMPORTANT IS HIS/HER:

Category	Extremely Important	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not Important	No Response
citizenship	44.4	34.8	12	1.1	2.7	
classroom behavior	63.8	34.9	1.4			
computer knowledge	24.3	45.5	27.8	.5	.8	1.1
cooperation with adults	62.7	34.9	2.5			
cooperation with children	51.2	44.7	3.5	.5		
creativity	40.1	45.5	13.9	.3		.3
grades on report cards	34.6	46.6	16.3	1.6		.8
grooming habits	32.4	46.9	18.3	1.6	.5	.3
leadership	25.3	49.6	20.7	3.0	.5	.8
nutrition habits	39.5	45.5	12.8	1.4		.8
problem-solving ability	61.3	34.9	3.0	.8		
score on standardized tests	25.3	43.6	24.8	4.1		2.2
study skills	62.7	36	1.1			.3
table manners	26.4	51.5	18.8	2.2	.8	.3
value development	58.9	32.4	6.8	.8	.3	.8

TABLE III

MEANS *

Variable	Grade Levels K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
citizenship	1.87	1.73	1.67	1.85	1.78	1.63	1.94	1.71	2.1
classroom behavior	1.39	1.23	1.29	1.37	1.51	1.33	1.18	1.45	1.58
computer knowledge	2.37	2.04	2.29	2.06	2.34	2.09	2	1.98	1.9
cooperation with adults	1.48	1.31	1.22	1.37	1.39	1.35	1.3	1.5	1.58
cooperation with children	1.63	1.46	1.43	1.46	1.54	1.53	1.36	1.69	1.68
creativity	1.66	1.54	1.67	1.67	1.68	1.68	1.88	1.8	2.1
grades on report cards	2.02	1.96	2	1.81	2.05	1.88	1.73	1.76	1.88
grooming habits	2.1	1.7	1.76	1.88	2.1	1.95	1.76	2.07	1.88
leadership	2.05	1.92	1.98	1.94	2.15	2.07	2.15	2.07	2.1
nutrition habits	1.76	1.62	1.67	1.75	1.8	1.97	1.79	1.71	1.88
problem-solving ability	1.46	1.19	1.27	1.46	1.54	1.44	1.48	1.57	1.43
score on standardized tests	2.1	2.15	2.22	2.15	2.51	2.09	2.06	2	2.15
study skills	1.41	1.31	1.35	1.33	1.46	1.37	1.3	1.43	1.58
table manners	1.9	1.77	1.94	2.02	2.12	2	1.82	2.12	2.23
value development	1.44	1.23	1.43	1.44	1.71	1.7	1.55	1.52	1.75

* lower means indicate perception of greater importance

TABLE IV

DESCENDING RANK:

PARENTAL RATINGS OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Category	Rank *
classroom behavior	1
study skills	1
cooperation with adults	3
problem solving ability	4
cooperation with children	5
value development	6
creativity	7
nutrition habits	8
grades on report cards	9
citizenship	10
grooming habits	11
table manners	12
leadership	13
computer knowledge	14
score on standardized tests	15

* Rank determined by calculating sum of percentages for 'extremely important' and 'very important' in Table II.

TABLE V

MEANS *

Variable	Grade Levels K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
arithmetic	3.39	2.81	3.02	2.6	2.66	2.67	2.52	3.17	2.65
art	9	9.54	9.48	9.54	9.27	9.77	10	10.12	10.15
French	10.85	10.77	10.94	10.98	10.95	10.88	10.49	10.71	10.35
grammar	5.78	6.27	5.2	5.42	4.9	5.4	4.94	4.12	4.65
guidance	8.98	9.88	9.71	9.71	9.95	9.84	10.39	9.38	9.75
handwriting	7.22	7.96	7.82	8.42	8.85	9.21	9.33	8.31	8.8
health	7.98	8.54	9.22	7.89	8.83	8.84	8.12	7.6	7.73
home economics	10.63	10.58	10.9	10.9	10.93	10.72	10.49	10.55	9.78
industrial arts	10.95	10.46	10.92	10.9	10.46	10.79	10.7	10.67	10.58
music	8.71	9.23	9	9.23	8.81	9.51	8.94	9.95	9.58
physical education	8.12	9	8.43	8.75	8.44	9	8.88	9.33	8.93
reading	1.9	1.77	1.74	2.06	1.71	1.84	2.58	2.38	4.28
science	6.32	6.39	6.69	6	6.1	5.54	6.3	6.52	5.48
social studies	7.73	6.65	7.61	6.75	7.17	6.79	7.21	7.12	6.85
spelling	5.78	5	5.18	5.64	6.27	5.42	5.64	5.88	6.8
typing	10.76	10.62	10.92	10.64	10.59	10.35	10.06	10.19	9.95
writing composition	7.76	6.85	6.55	7.6	6.22	6.02	6.46	6.69	7.03

* lower means indicate perception of greater importance

TABLE VI

MEANS OF PARENTAL RANKINGS

OF ACADEMIC SUBJECT AREAS

Subject	Mean *
Reading	2.2
Arithmetic	2.8
Grammar	5.2
Spelling	5.7
Science	6.1
Writing Composition	6.8
Social Studies	7.1
Health	8.3
Handwriting	8.4
Physical Education	8.8
Music	9.2
Art	9.6
Guidance	9.7
Typing	10.5
Home Economics	10.6
Industrial Arts	10.7
French	10.8

* Parents selected and ranked 10 most important subjects from a list of 17 subjects.

TABLE VII

FREQUENCY TABULATIONS

TIME ALLOTMENT FOR HOMEWORK

Desired daily allotment of time for homework	Percentage of Total
Less than one-half hour	10.6
One-half hour to one hour	41.1
One hour to one and one-half hours	27.8
One and one-half hours to two hours	15.0
More than two hours	2.5
No answer	3

TABLE VIII

PERCENTAGE

TIME ALLOTMENT FOR HOMEWORK

Variable	Grade Levels K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Less than one-half hour	26.8	34.6	16.3	7.7	7.3	4.7	0	4.8	0
One-half hour to one hour	41.5	38.5	57.1	51.9	61	32.6	33	23.8	22.5
One hour to one and one-half hours	14.6	15.4	12.2	30.8	22	37.2	36.4	47.6	32.5
One and one-half hours to two hours	7.3	11.5	10.2	7.7	4.9	16.3	24.2	16.7	40
More than two hours	2.4	0	2	0	2.4	4.7	3	7.1	0
No response	7.3	0	2	1,9	2.4	4.7	3	0	5

TABLE IX

FREQUENCY TABULATION

PREFERENCE FOR INSTRUCTIONAL GROUPING OF STUDENTS

Instructional Grouping	Percentage of Total
Children with ability similar to your child's	46.3
Children with different abilities	49.6
No answer	4.1

TABLE X

PERCENTAGE

INSTRUCTIONAL GROUPING

Variable	Grade Levels								
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
With children of similar ability	39	57.7	44.9	38.5	53.7	46.5	48.5	52.4	42.5
With children of different ability	53.7	38.5	51	59.6	43.9	48.8	45.5	45.2	52.5
No response	7.3	3.8	4.1	1.9	2.4	4.7	6.1	2.4	5

TABLE XI

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

GRADE LEVEL

Variable	Level of Significance	Direction of Significance
classroom behavior	.012	6 > 1, 2 > 4, 8
cooperation with adults	.036	6, 2 > 8
French	.025	8, 7 > K, 4
health	.047	8, 7, 6 > K, 1
home economics	.001	8, 7, 6 > 4, 3, 2, 1, K
reading	.001	K, 1, 2, 3, 4, > 6, 7, 8
typing	.035	8, 6 > 2
time allotment for homework	.001	8, 7, 6, 5 > 2, 1, K

TABLE XII

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

RACE

Variable	Level of Significance	Direction of Significance
computer knowledge	.001	B>W
grades on report cards	.001	B>W
grooming habits	.001	B>W
problem-solving ability	.017	W>B
study skills	.001	B>W
grammar	.002	W>B
guidance	.024	B>W
handwriting	.001	B>W
health	.001	B>W
reading	.001	W>B
science	.001	W>B
writing composition	.011	W>B
time allotment for homework	.001	B>W

TABLE XIII

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

SEX

Variable	Level of Sigificance	Direction of Sigificance
classroom behavior	.052	F>M
grades on report cards	.013	F>M
grooming habits	.012	F>M
home economics	.051	F>M
industrial arts	.001	M>F
time allotment for homework	.013	F>M

I. Background Information

Please circle the answer for each item.

1. Grade level of child: K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

2. Race of child: Black White Other (please specify _____)

3. Sex of child: Female Male

II. Each item on the left is to be rated. The rating categories are: extremely important, very important, somewhat important, not very important, not important. Numerals represent each of the rating categories.

Please circle a numeral to rate each item.

In your child's education at school, how important is his or her:

		Extremely Important	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not Important
1.	citizenship	1	2	3	4	5
2.	classroom behavior	1	2	3	4	5
3.	computer knowledge	1	2	3	4	5
4.	cooperation with adults	1	2	3	4	5
5.	cooperation with children	1	2	3	4	5
6.	creativity	1	2	3	4	5
7.	grades on report cards	1	2	3	4	5
8.	grooming habits	1	2	3	4	5
9.	leadership	1	2	3	4	5
10.	nutrition habits	1	2	3	4	5
11.	problem-solving ability	1	2	3	4	5
12.	score on standardized tests (Ex: Criterion Referenced Test)	1	2	3	4	5
13.	study skills	1	2	3	4	5
14.	table manners	1	2	3	4	5
15.	value development	1	2	3	4	5

III. Your child studies a number of different subjects. Some of these are listed below. How important are they to the educational development of your child? Choose the ten most important.

Write them in the blanks beginning with the most important subject by number one.

Arithmetic
Art
French
Grammar
Guidance
Handwriting
Health
Home Economics
Industrial Arts
Music
Physical Education
Reading
Science
Social Studies
Spelling
Typing
Writing Composition

If other courses are important that do not appear on the list (such as mini course offerings) please feel free to write them in any of the spaces below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

IV. Other Questions

Please circle the letter for each question that represents your answer.

1. What do you consider an appropriate amount of time for your child to spend with homework each day?

   a. less than one-half hour
   b. one-half hour to one hour
   c. one hour to one and one-half hours
   d. one and one-half hours to two hours
   e. more than two hours

2. What kind of classroom setting would you prefer for your child?
   a. children with ability similar to your child's
   b. children with different abilities

V. Parents' Turn

In the space below, please write questions or comments that you would like to offer relative to your child's education.